

Lost And Found

Luke 15:1-10

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables about things that are lost: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. All three have happy endings. The lost gets found, and there is rejoicing!

There is rejoicing in heaven, but not on earth from Jesus' audience. He told the parables to Pharisees and scribes who were grumbling because Jesus was eating with tax collectors and other notorious sinners. The reason they didn't rejoice is that they couldn't see themselves in the stories. They understood that Jesus was talking about the bad people who were lost, and they weren't pleased with the happy endings. They wanted those sinners to be punished, shamed.

What the Pharisees and scribes didn't understand was that Jesus' parables were also about them! They were lost! They had no love or compassion for fellow sinners. So when the shepherd went out looking for the lost sheep, when the woman searched for her missing coin, when the father scanned the horizon every day hoping to see his prodigal son again, Jesus was reaching out to them! Jesus wanted the scribes and Pharisees to be found. He wanted to have a party in heaven celebrating them. But they couldn't be found if they didn't realize they were lost. And they refused to admit that.

Can we admit that we are all lost? Every bit as sinful as the tax collectors and notorious sinners, every bit as sinful as the unloving Pharisees and scribes? If so, then we can also see that Jesus died on the cross to find us.

One of the biggest temptations pastors and congregations face is numbers: average worship attendance, number of adult converts, average giving per communicant member. We're tempted to measure success in terms of numbers. So we get puffed up and proud when the numbers increase. "Look at what I have accomplished!" And we despair when the numbers are decreasing—the pews are empty, finances dwindling. We can lose heart. Worry about the future. Go into survival mode.

Love of numbers can be intoxicating. Our sinful nature worships at the altar of numerical success. "Look at how good things are going!" The Bible calls this idolatry. The same would be true if all we can think of is how bad things are.

Numbers can be a good thing. The Book of Acts has a lot of numbers: three thousand, five thousand, "more than ever believers were added." The Book of Numbers has a lot of numbers. God commanded a census. There were 601,730 men. This showed how the hand of God was blessing His people.

But then, the love of numbers can also be a great temptation. King David ordered a census of his fighting men. We don't know his motive, but it couldn't have been good. It says Satan "incited" him (1 Chr 21:1). And because of it, the Lord sent a plague. Seventy thousand men died.

But that is what's so comforting about our text today. Jesus isn't concerned about filling all the pews. He leaves the ninety-nine in the open country. He's concerned about a

single sheep. He searches for one lost sheep. He is filled with joy when one lost sheep is found.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were grumbling and complaining: *“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”* *“This man,”* they didn’t even want to say Jesus’ name. What they said about Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them was true. But they thought it was a bad thing.

We see it as a good thing! Jesus shows God’s gracious heart in the “lost” parables. His delight is to seek and save one lost sinner. God’s Word clearly teaches that God so loved the whole world of sinners. But these parables also show us God’s love for the individual sinner.

Every single person is important to Jesus. One out of one hundred sheep, one out of ten coins. One may seem insignificant to us. But you are more precious in the sight of God than all the gold on earth. Your soul and body are precious to Him. If you had been the only sinner in the world, He would have died for you. God’s love for you is beyond our understanding.

To leave ninety-nine sheep alone in the wilderness to seek one doesn’t make sense. No one who is in to numbers would do such a thing. It’s not worth it. We would cut our losses. We’d say, “Well, I still have ninety-nine that haven’t wandered off.” But our Lord is like an irresponsible shepherd. He’s consumed with passion to save the single lost soul. He won’t rest until He’s found that sheep. That’s a great comfort.

In these parables, we see a loss, an intense search, and a joyful finding. What a happy day it was when the lost sheep was found. The shepherd didn’t give it a beating. He was compassionate. He didn’t even make the sheep to walk. He carried it on his shoulders.

And then we see how the whole community rejoiced. He calls his friends and neighbors together and says, *“Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.”* What great joy there is when a sinner repents. What joy God and all the holy angels experience when one lost sinner is found!

“This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” Thanks be to God the Pharisees were right! Jesus is constantly welcoming and eating with sinners. He continues to do this, feeding us with His own body and blood. Picture this scene when you come up for communion: Jesus has you on His shoulders. He’s carrying you with joy. He can’t wait for the party. You are that one lost sheep. He has found you. He has worked repentance and faith in you. There is rejoicing over you today, rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God.

To God, one sinner is valuable beyond measure. You are valuable beyond measure. You’re not a number. Your Good Shepherd knows you by name; you are His. You are a precious lamb. He loves you. He died for you. He redeemed you. He searched for you. He found you. He is full of joy over you. Amen.